

Remembrance Sunday
12th. November 2017

Psalm 2. Genesis 11.1-9

Introduction and recap.

Last week we looked at Psalm 1. This Psalm contains the essence of the Christian life, putting off the old way of life, and putting on the new way of living. We are given the contrast between the way of the World, and the Christians behavior in three negative instructions, and two positive instructions. The Christian does not do certain things, but that is because they prefer other things, namely meditating on the Word of God, and through this, by the work of the Holy Spirit, they are being transformed inwardly so that our new nature grows. This new nature comes when Christ comes into our hearts, when we become Christians. In this way, our desires and purpose are changed, and we delight to have fellowship with God.

As an aside, when we receive Christ into our lives, we receive a whole Christ because He cannot be divided into parts. The reason that we have to grow up, is that Christ comes into us in full title, but like yeast, the work of the Holy Spirit is a process and takes time. We need to understand this, or else we will become discouraged by our lack of progress, and the devil will do his worst to convince us that we are not proper Christians, or worse, encourage us to give up!

Psalm 1 contrasts the wicked and the believer in stark terms. The Godly person is like a tree. Not only is it growing beside water, but it is planted by God in that place. Such a tree will continue to grow despite drought and hardship because of the continual supply of the stream, a figure of the supply of the life of God by the Holy Spirit. Such people will bear fruit in season. Indeed it is inevitable that they will do so, given the place of planting, the One who tends them, and the nature of the tree. When an apple tree produces apples, we do not write to a paper to tell them of a miracle in our gardens! If the tree is suitably planted, and tended, it is in its DNA to produce apples, not pears or cabbages! This is how it should be with the Christian. The presence of Christ within will cause us to produce holy fruit of character, devotion and acts of loving faith.

The wicked are dismissed in a most disparaging way. They are like chaff that the wind blows away. The Psalm has nothing good to say about the wicked and his end, which is to perish.

Psalm 2

This Psalm looks at the same issue, but says more about the bigger picture, the world and cosmic perspective of how God and the wicked interact. It is important that we take these two Psalms as two sides of the same coin. In Psalm 1, the happiness of the believer is in view, and how they may ensure that they are happy. We come into relationship by grace alone and faith alone, but once in a relationship with God, we are to grow up. The reason that God wants us to grow up to become more Christ-like is not to make ourselves acceptable to God, but to enable us to come, as it were, to the age of majority where we can inherit what the Father has willed to us in His living will.

It would not take anyone very long to point out that life is not as simple as Psalm 1 presents it. Read out of context, and apart from Psalm 2 it represents an incomplete picture of life. It promises blessing and fruitfulness, but all believers are aware of sin, corruption and incompleteness of soul. We are not completed works, but works in progress. This progress is sometimes rapid and joyful, and at other times we may feel that we are getting worse rather than better! If any believer thinks that our lives will be a non-stop course of joy and ease and all going well, then think again. Jesus spoke in the Sermon on the Mount about persecution being the blessed way. The Psalmist in Psalm 73 asks the question, why it is that the wicked prosper. If you read Psalm 73, the answer is that the prosperity and ease of the wicked is not lasting, but temporal and passing. To think that they are the blessed is but a temporary delusion.

We know that Christians have had it hard over the OT and NT eras. Think of the sufferings and patience of Job. Think of Joseph, sold by his brothers into slavery, accused of a crime he had not committed. Wrongly imprisoned, and probably there was no release date set. Think of the hardships of Daniel and his three friends who would rather lose their lives than walk in the way of the, 'counsel of the wicked.' Consider the Apostles and Prophets. Consider the Martyrs, but above all, consider Christ who was abused and rejected, shamefully treated and killed, that it was for our transgressions that He took all this.

Given all this, and much other Christian history, we are faced with the question of if the godly person of Psalm 1 is the blessed person, then why is there such suffering in Christian history, and in the lives of so many believers?

Psalm 2 answers that question, though every believer should already know the answer! Psalm 2 looks at the chaff in more detail. We discover from this Psalm, that even though chaff, the ungodly are not powerless, inactive, or passive in this world. We are confronted with the thrust of ungodliness, and what it expends its life and time doing. We are looking now at the interaction of fallen man and God on a worldly scale and indeed a cosmic scale. In fact, the processes outlined in these two Psalms continue simultaneously, and will do so until the return of Christ when a division will come between sheep and goats, seed and chaff.

Romans 1 shows us that not only does fallen man pursue his own desires, self-righteous and evil, but encourages others to follow this independent and rebellious path. The believer needs to understand, and should understand, that those who are not in a relationship with God are alienated from Him, and are hostile to Him. Romans 5 v 10ff. speaks of this state as that of being enemies of God.

Verse 1

Why? The question that so often is heard from the lips of people who do not see the world through the revelation of Scripture. Evil is only incomprehensible to those who think that mankind is good! Romans 3 v 10 onwards tells us that there is no-one who

does good, that measures up to God's requirement and standard. Read the argument that leads up to this conclusion. Here is the reason the world is as it is.

The Why? Of this verse is not the 'why' of not knowing, doubt and fear, but the why of incredulity. It is the 'why' of, 'why is that man trying to empty the ocean with a tea cup?' 'Why is that man cutting off the branch that he is sitting on?' 'Why is that man trying to blow out a forest fire like one would a birthday candle?' It is the why that asks, 'why it is that people attempt to do the glaringly obviously impossible!'

The fact that people and nations conspire against God is not sensible on two counts. Firstly, it is the creature shaking his fist at the creator. It is the drowning man trying to sink the life boat, it is the child trying to demolish a mountain with a plastic hammer! The hammer will be worn out before it removes even a crumb from the granite! However, people who do not acknowledge the nature and the person of God think that He is like them, mutable, emotionally unstable, and open to defeat.

The second reason that mankind raging against God is so foolish and unproductive is found later in the Psalm at verse 6. There is no point in mankind attempting to install itself on the throne of God, because God has already filled that position with His anointed, the Lord Jesus Christ!

It is a feature of human history that just like the people who built the Tower of Babel, it is in our fallen natures to try and make a name for ourselves. The Tower of Babel was at one level an attempt to establish a dynasty, but there was more. The tower was an attempt to storm heaven and invade the habitation of God with the idea of taking control of man's eternal destiny. We may as well try to reach the nearest star with a ladder than storm heaven!

These aspects of the Tower of babel may seem naïve to us, but think of the kingdoms, civilizations and rulers who have come and gone. Many of them have left bits and pieces behind them that we do not understand, and their names are forgotten. Others have tried to establish godless societies, and Third Reich and so on, but they have all tumbled, and despite persecutions and genocides, the church remains!

Not everyone rises up in such a way, but enmity towards God is expressed by saying things, and standing on them, such as, 'God is dead,' or does not exist, or is 'not the boss of me.' However, even the greatest of people cannot add a day to their lives or a hair to their heads. We cannot set the time for the sun rise or the season to turn. We don't even have a say about the day of our birth or the day of our death. Our perception of personal freedom is more elevated than factual!

Verse 3

If this was said by a child, we would say that they are throwing a strop! I remember the little daughter of a cousin of mine, when cross with her mother. She tried to think of the worst thing she could do, and so threatened that she would take her mother's shoes and flush them down the toilet. It was all that we could do not to burst out laughing as

the child was sent to her room, and stomped off, possibly thinking she had made the threat to end all threats! Once she was gone, we almost fell off our seats, it was so funny, because her worst threat was as frightening as a kittens lick!

That was funny, but mankind living in active hostility to God is not. Kingdoms have been built, genocides have been practiced. Justice and fairness have been left to die in the streets, and all manner of evils have been perpetrated in the name of human progress. Because of greed and avarice, our land and seas are polluted and dying, slavery has never been more rife, poverty and disease rule whole nations, and it is all of our doing! As humanity wars against God the collateral damage is the downward spiral of morality and the rape of the planet. The second half of Romans 1 describes the descent of mankind, and this is the consequence of seeking to 'break the chains' of God's rule.

Verses 4-6

God does not laugh because He thinks all this is funny 'ha,ha.' God laughs and scoffs, because when all of fallen humanity lines up in battle array, with the intention of casting God from His throne, God could, and in due course will, puff and blow them away like chaff. The worst that the godless can do is stamp on their own habitation, and come against God with weapons made out of tissue paper! If you doubt this then think about this – where is Mrs. Mao? She was determined to stamp out Christianity from China. She is long gone, but the faith is spreading like wild fire in the nation! Where is Hitler? He planned to exterminate the Jews. He tried, but failed! Many expert observers have predicted the demise of the Christian Church over the years. However, when the Church has been at its lowest and worst state, God has taken to the field and come with revival and called the Church back to Himself. This year is the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and that was a revival which is still having an effect on our society today!

God holds His peace for a time, but then He speaks. When God speaks, the peoples are terrified and the nations quake. The subject of God's temporal judgments is not often talked about today, mostly because most people are too blind to see, and comfort themselves with false securities that we are now beyond all that and attribute everything to 'natural laws and processes.' However, Scripture still tells us that God is there and that He acts within our history.

A metaphor may help us understand better how life is. Humanity has a very elevated view of its autonomy and freedom. We tend to speak more about what we have accomplished and hope to accomplish that what we cannot do. We have put a man on the moon, but we can't feed the starving. We can transplant a heart, but we can't excise a bitterness.

Think of life like this. A passenger ship is sailing from Portsmouth to New York. While on the journey, the passengers are free to do as they wish. They can sit out on deck or walk about. They can prop up the bar all night, they could even trash their rooms and riot if they wished. However, the fact remains that their final destination is set, and when they arrive at port, crimes and breakages will have to be paid for! Life has both the appearance of freedom, but the course of the ship and its destination is fixed by God.

The greatest news for the Christian is found in verse 6. It is this, God has set Christ on the throne. It is difficult for weak, mortal, short lived humans to understand anything about absolute power. Absolute power is not hasty, it does not need to express itself instantly in response to every twist and turn of history. Absolute power is never under threat, anxious, uncomfortable or doubtful of its ability to do as it wills, and it complete what it intends. Let humanity do its worst, the ship will still sail on to its final destination, and plough on at its appointed speed! The power of God is like this and much more, and so heaven is at peace, even though Earth is full of noise and tumult! Verses 7-9 describe the working of the Father and Son, and says something about the weakness of the strength of man – we are like pottery!

Verses 10-12

These verses give the conclusion to the Psalm, 'be wise,' submit to God! Make peace with God before He comes in His final act of vengeance and blessing, the vengeance upon the wicked and His blessing on the righteous, because after that, the vessel will have reached port and the opportunity to get right with God will have passed.

What can we do when we are confronted with an overpowering force? Either we fight and are destroyed, or we yield. The scenario here is that wicked humanity is going to be confronted with an absolutely powerful, just and good God. What will we do in the face off absolute goodness? The advice of the Psalmist is to yield utterly to mercy and grace. When Paul was knocked off his donkey on the Damascus road, and confronted by God, he was shown how hard it is to kick against God. What did Paul do? He surrendered to grace and goodness and the will of God, so should we, unless we want to continue in foolishness and stupidity!

God is patient and eternal. We are contingent and our life span is short, and this makes us hasty and impatient because we want all things within our lifetime. Just because we do not see the division of the Righteous from the wicked, does not mean it will not happen.

The latter half of verse 12, 'blessed are all who take refuge in him,' brings up back to the thrust of Psalm 1. No matter what life brings, the godly person will receive an eternal blessing, while the wicked will perish. Therefore it is pointless for a Christian to fret and be anxious because godless people seem to have a better time of it than they. The godless person's prosperity and sense of wellbeing will die with them. The godly person's blessings will be full in heaven, even if sparse in this life.

Application

There is only one application that I would add to that of the Psalm, and it is this. Is the Christian freed from all responsibility to the godless? Is it enough just to comfort ourselves with the dubious attitude that all will be well, because the godless will get what is coming to them?

That is not what the Scripture says. 1 Timothy tells us to pray for all, for it is God's desire that all be saved. Jeremiah 7 is an account of the advice Jerimiah wrote to the exiles in Babylon. In verse 7, he tells them to seek the welfare of the cities to which they have been taken captive. If God blesses these cities, the people of God will also be blessed.

It is God's command, and our duty to pray for the places we live, and the people of our communities and nations. This the Church here and elsewhere is failing to do, and this is most serious.

The Lord's Prayer instructs us that our principle concern of life should be that God's Name be hallowed, His kingdom come, and His will be done. This has directly to do with the subduing of the wrath of the peoples and nations and kings against God. They will not submit to God unless gracious favour is poured upon them from above, and the only way to procure this is to pray.

The nations are in turmoil today, there are wars and rumours of war, what will the response of believers be? We either pray, or face the same sufferings that will come to all.